

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Original) A process for preparing an F₂-containing gas comprising the steps of:

exciting at least one fluoro compound in a fluoro compound-containing gas by conferring energy on the fluoro compound-containing gas under reduced pressure; and partially or completely converting the excited fluoro compound-containing gas containing the excited fluoro compound into F₂ under normal pressure or overpressure.

2. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 1, wherein the step of exciting a fluoro compound is performed in a first zone maintained under reduced pressure; and

the step of converting the gas into F₂ is performed in a second zone communicating with the first zone and maintained under normal pressure or overpressure.

3. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 1, wherein the step of exciting a fluoro compound is performed in a first zone maintained under reduced pressure; and

the step of converting the gas into F₂ comprises maintaining the pressure in the transportation system under a normal pressure or overpressure condition during transportation of the excited fluoro compound-containing gas to a second zone communicating with the first zone.

4. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 1, wherein the step of exciting a fluoro compound is performed in a first zone maintained under reduced pressure; and

the step of converting the gas into F₂ is performed by maintaining the pressure in the first zone under a normal pressure or overpressure condition.

5. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 1, wherein the step of exciting a fluoro compound is performed in a first chamber maintained under reduced pressure; and

the step of converting the gas into F₂ comprises transporting the excited fluoro compound-containing gas

In re of: TANIOKA1

containing the excited fluoro compound from the first chamber to a second chamber maintained under normal pressure or overpressure via a gas channel connecting the first chamber and the second chamber.

6. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 1, wherein the step of exciting a fluoro compound is performed in a first chamber maintained under reduced pressure; and

the step of converting the gas into F₂ comprises maintaining the pressure in the transportation system under a normal pressure or overpressure condition during transportation of the excited fluoro compound-containing gas containing the excited fluoro compound from the first chamber to a second chamber via a gas channel connecting the first chamber and the second chamber.

7. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 1, wherein the step of exciting a fluoro compound is performed in a first chamber maintained under reduced pressure; and

the step of converting the gas into F₂ is performed in the first chamber by maintaining the first chamber under normal pressure or overpressure.

8. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 5, ~~or 6~~ wherein a vacuum pump is provided in a gas channel connecting the first chamber and the second chamber and said vacuum pump is used during the step of transporting the excited fluoro compound-containing gas from the first chamber to the second chamber.

9. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of ~~any one of claims~~ claim 1, ~~to 8~~ wherein the step of exciting a fluoro compound comprises ionizing the fluoro compound-containing gas.

10. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of ~~any one of claims~~ claim 1, ~~to 9~~ wherein the fluoro compound is a gaseous fluoro compound selected from the group consisting of linear, branched or cyclic saturated perfluorocarbons, linear, branched or cyclic unsaturated perfluorocarbons, carbonyl fluorides, perfluoro hypofluorides, perfluoro peroxides, perfluoroether compounds, oxygen-containing fluorides, interhalogen fluorides, iodine-containing fluorides, sulfur-containing fluorides, nitrogen-containing fluorides, silicon-containing fluorides, rare gas-containing fluorides, ~~or~~ and combinations thereof.

11. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of ~~any one of claims~~ claim 1, to 9 wherein the fluoro compound is selected from the group consisting of CF₄, C₂F₆, C₃F₈, C₄F₁₀, C₅F₁₂, C₆F₁₄, C₂F₄, C₃F₆, C₄F₈, C₅F₁₀, C₆F₁₂, C₄F₆, FCOF, CF₃COF, CF₂(COF)₂, C₃F₇COF, CF₃OF, C₂F₅OF, CF₂(OF)₂, CF₃COOF, CF₃OOFCF₃, CF₃COOOF, CF₃OCF₃, C₂F₅OC₂F₅, C₂F₄OC₂F₄, OF₂, SOF₂, SOF₄, NOF, ClF₃, IF₅, BrF₅, BrF₃, CF₃I, C₂F₅I, N₂F₄, NF₃, NOF₃, SiF₄, Si₂F₆, XeF₂, XeF₄, KrF₂, SF₄, SF₆, ~~or~~ and a mixture thereof.

12. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of ~~any one of claims~~ claim 1, to 11 wherein the fluoro compound-containing gas comprises an inert gas and/or oxygen.

13. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 1, 12 wherein the fluoro compound-containing gas comprises an inert gas and/or oxygen, and wherein ~~said~~ the inert gas is selected from the group consisting of He, Ne, Ar, Xe, Kr, N₂, ~~or~~ and a combination thereof.

14. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of ~~any one of claims~~ 1, to 13 wherein the

In re of: TANIOKA1

fluoro compound is one or more members selected from the group consisting of NF_3 , C_2F_6 , and FCOFCOF_2 .

15. (Currently Amended) The process for preparing an F_2 -containing gas of claim 14, wherein the fluoro compound is ionized in the presence of oxygen when it is a perfluorocarbon or a mixture containing one or more perfluorocarbons.

16. (Currently Amended) A process for modifying ~~at the~~ surface of an article comprising contacting an F_2 -containing gas ~~obtained by the process for preparing an F_2 -containing gas of any one of claims 1 to 15~~ with the surface of the article under reduced pressure or overpressure or normal pressure, wherein said F_2 -containing gas is obtained by a process comprising the steps of:

exciting at least one fluoro compound in a fluoro compound-containing gas by conferring energy on the fluoro compound-containing gas under reduced pressure; and

partially or completely converting the excited fluoro compound-containing gas containing the excited fluoro compound into F_2 under normal pressure or overpressure.

17. (Currently Amended) The surface modification process of claim 16, further comprising the step of

In re of: TANIOKA1

introducing an inert gas and/or oxygen after conferring energy on the fluoro compound-containing gas before contacting the gas with the article to be surface-modified.

18. (Currently Amended) The surface modification process of claim 16, ~~or 17~~ wherein the surface modification is performed by fluorinating the surface of the article.

19. (Currently Amended) The surface modification process of ~~any one of claims~~ claim 16, ~~to 18~~ wherein the article to be surface-modified is one or more members selected from the group consisting of metals, metal compounds and polymers.

20. (Currently Amended) The surface modification process of claim 19, wherein the polymer is an article based on polypropylene.

21. (Currently Amended) The surface modification process of claim 19, wherein the metal compound is one or more members selected from the group consisting of metal oxides, metal nitrides, metal carbides, metal hydroxides and metal chlorides.

In re of: TANIOKA1

22. (Currently Amended) The surface modification process of claim 19, wherein the metal compound is a compound based on Si.

23. (Currently Amended) The surface modification process of claim 22, wherein the compound based on Si is Si, SiO₂, Si₃N₄, SiC, polysilicon, amorphous silicon, or a combination thereof.

24. (Currently Amended) The surface modification process of claim 22, wherein the compound based on Si is deposited in an LPCVD equipment.

25. (Original) An equipment for preparing an F₂-containing gas comprising:

a means for ionizing a fluoro compound-containing gas under reduced pressure; and

a pressure controlling means communicating with the ionizing means and controlling the pressure of the ionized fluoro compound-containing gas at a normal pressure or overpressure condition.

26. (Currently Amended) A surface modification equipment comprising a means communicating with the pressure controlling means in the equipment for preparing an F₂-

containing gas of claim 25, and positioning an article whose surface should be contacted with the F₂-containing gas prepared in the equipment for preparing an F₂-containing gas under reduced pressure or overpressure or normal pressure.

27. (Currently Amended) The surface modification equipment of claim 26, further comprising a vacuum pump or compressor communicating with the means for positioning the article.

28. (Currently Amended) A method for using the equipment of ~~any one of claim~~ claim 25, ~~to 27~~ to directly fluorinate an organic and/or inorganic material.

29. (New) The process for preparing an F₂-containing gas of claim 6, wherein a vacuum pump is provided in a gas channel connecting the first chamber and the second chamber and said vacuum pump is used during the step of transporting the excited fluoro compound-containing gas from the first chamber to the second chamber.